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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by the National Alliance of Women’s Organizations, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

1. NAWO, the National Alliance of Women's Organizations, is an umbrella for over 60 women's organizations and individual supporters. It provides representation and support for members and works to promote gender equality and the implementation of internationally agreed instruments for women's human rights. Working with sister organizations in Scotland and Northern Ireland as members of the Joint Committee on Women of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, it presents members' concerns to the European women's lobby and vice versa lobbies at national level on gender equality issues. NAWO participates actively at Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) prep-com meetings in Geneva and regularly sends delegations to CSW in New York.

2. In 2010, NAWO contributed to the Women's National Commission (WNC) publication, *What's Beijing got to do with me?* produced to celebrate Beijing+15. *We deeply regret the decision of the present Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to abolish this unique, widely admired and inexpensive part of the national machinery to hear and heed women's voices, especially as it was set up in 1969 in response to the United Nations request that Member States should have mechanisms in place for hearing and working with informed women.*

3. Also in 2010 at a side-event, *Age Cannot Wither Us*, during the fifty-fourth session of CSW, NAWO, with speakers from Ghana, the Baha'i and Northern Ireland, examined the plight of older women. Demographic transition towards older populations is occurring in both developed and developing United Nations Member States.¹ Older women globally, including many widows, suffer particularly from poverty, loneliness and ill health and the numbers are set to grow substantially. In the United Kingdom alone, in 2008, 3.3 million pensioners were receiving means-tested pension credit, two thirds of them women. The poverty level of women pensioners in the United Kingdom remains one of the highest in Europe and State provision one of the lowest.

4. Women's low earnings in employment, along with unequal domestic responsibilities, is an important contributory factor to this situation. At school, girls fail to study the subjects most likely to equip them for well paid employment. Thus, twice as many women as men work in the public sector, and thousands are now likely to lose their jobs as a result of policies to cut government spending as a means to repaying national debt in the global financial crisis.² Most women will be in clerical work lacking the qualifications and training to find well paid work elsewhere.

5. NAWO is therefore particularly concerned that the fifty-fifth session of CSW should take action to ensure girls attend and have equal access to education with boys and that within schools girls are encouraged to study subjects that should help to break down segregation in the labour market, which contributes significantly to traditional unequal pay and to women's relative poverty. Gender stereotyping within

* Issued without formal editing.

¹ R. Lee, "The demographic transition: three centuries of fundamental change", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 17, No. 4, 1 November 2003, pp. 167-190 (24).

² Women's Budget Group, *Analysis of United Kingdom Coalition Government's Spending Review*, 9 November 2010, London.

schools as well as in societies at all levels, has been identified in previous CSW reviews as a hindrance to the advancement of women everywhere: this requires challenging from the earliest days in education.³

6. In recent years, while women may substantially outnumber men in biology and medicine, especially nursing, men predominate in maths, physical sciences, computer science and engineering. They are thus much better equipped to find well paid jobs in corporations, while women are more likely to find work in generally less well paid public sector occupations. In the United Kingdom, women make up only 12.3 per cent of all employees in science, engineering and technology (SET) occupations. In addition, more women than men are in lower level jobs (26.5 per cent against 16.5 per cent of men). Women are less likely to be in SET management and their hourly rate of pay, in professional work, leads to an unacceptable pay gap of 11.1 per cent, slightly lower than the national pay gap of 12.6 per cent.

7. Women's lower level of occupation also reduces their pension earnings. Much can be done to alter this situation – in the United Kingdom, the planning and building of the Olympics 2012 village has women in all the trades and in management at all levels.⁴ The political will is required, as is effective and knowledgeable leadership to devise and implement a strategy for getting women in and changing the culture of the workplace. It can be done.

8. Inequalities build up as women have children. And this too prevents their equal participation in science and technology. Overall, 75 per cent of women between 25 and 49 years of age were in employment in 2008 in the United Kingdom, but for women with children under five, the proportion was 57 per cent. While 38 per cent of women with dependent children worked part time this was true of only 4 per cent of men, reflecting both stereotypes and the real impact of the loss of men's wages/salaries over those of women.

9. Parenting is an expensive task and families are estimated to lose an average of £200,000 per child up to the age of 18, much of it in loss of women's earnings. Elder care also falls mainly to women with about 2.5 million people as "super carers", looking after both the young and the old. Eighty per cent of these are women, most middle aged. They can draw the £53.90 Carer's Allowance, but only if their earnings amount to less than £100 per week and they are not receiving other benefits. NAWO urges Governments to recognize the burden these carers are carrying, and the huge barrier to continuing a useful working career which in turn impacts on women's capacity to remain in well paid work and to their later pension entitlements. Governments are saving at the expense of women.

10. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) includes a proposal that nations should prepare parallel budgets indicating the contribution to national prosperity represented by the voluntary sector. As yet, no nation signatory to BPfA has introduced these measures. They would increase respect for voluntary work, raise women's status and promote concern to advance equal pay for work of equal worth.

³ Agreed conclusions 12 March 2004, as adopted, Commission on the Status of Women, forty-eighth session, 1-12 March 2004, "The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality". See "Agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action, 1996-2009" (ST/ESA/327), pp. 133-137.

⁴ Speech by Lorraine Martin, Head, Olympics Delivery Authority, "Employment skills, equality and inclusion", at the Women's National Commission CSW preparatory meeting, London, October 2010.

Gender-equal earnings would also contribute to national productivity and help to reduce all forms of violence against women, especially domestic violence.

11. NAWO's members include organizations that work for specific categories of women such as widows for whom the difficulties enumerated here are even worse especially in the developing world where harmful traditional practices render them specially vulnerable. Widows for Peace and Democracy (WPD) states there remains a dearth of knowledge about marital status in national statistics; hence we seek the implementation of agreements reached at the fifty-fourth session of CSW to disaggregate data by marital status as well as gender and age. Widowhood is a root cause of girls out-of-school and school drop-outs while child head of households and child brides are more likely to be the children of widows. Widows also experience greater discrimination than married women in training and employment as well as suffering from particularly discriminatory inheritance laws and much violence both domestically and as victims of rape, especially when they may have been expelled from home and become displaced persons and homeless.

12. Action:

- Implement agreements reached previously at CSW such as the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by marital status as well as gender and age.
- Combat gender stereotypes throughout life and marital status stereotypes from puberty.
- Ensure access to education for girls, especially children of widows; monitor education systems to ensure all children continue to be taught without bias, guarding against particular faith or cultural beliefs that undermine gender equality and promote traditional roles.
- Strengthen careers teaching to enable children to see the potential in all available occupations, regardless of gender stereotypes.
- Offer accurate pictures of modern engineering's unisex appeal.
- Encourage school leavers to plan long-term, including seeing the value of contributing to a pension scheme.
- Enlist media support for the promotion of women and men in roles now subject to gender stereotypes. Seek media help in breaking down job segregation.
- Review work now seen as "women's" or "men's" work and reassess its value to the community. Gradually adjust salaries, wages and pensions accordingly.
- Encourage (or require) professional associations and corporations in science and engineering to appoint women to their governing boards. This should be in a context where all boards are required to appoint women.
- Raise State pensions enough to provide all pensioners with a basic standard of living and where member States do not provide them, seek to do so as a basic minimum right.
- Urge Member States to produce parallel accounts reflecting the value of unpaid work.